

120 people in my community in Alaska—Anchorage. Another owner of a video production company had one of the best years ever, and he is doing work for corporate clients who are willing to spend money.

These are all very positive developments. Now, as we approach the end of the year, we in this Chamber need to do our part to keep the momentum moving forward. People watch us, and we squabble over many issues. As I mentioned, all this good news is because of the work a slim majority did over the last 3 years in this body because we believe in the future, in what the potential is of this great country in which we live. Maybe some had different views on what could happen. We believed in what is possible. These statistics show us that belief is now paying off.

As I look at where we are today, we need to continue to make these smart public policy decisions that create a sound economy. We need to do it as best we can in a bipartisan way. What I am talking about now is extending the tax cut for middle-class American families, continuing the tax relief, giving a reduction in our payroll taxes, which is due to expire at the end of the year.

Before any of us leave Washington later this month for the holidays, we clearly have to resolve this issue. In my opinion, we have no choice, and here is why: Unless Congress takes action, the average middle-class family will be hit by a \$1,000 tax increase starting January 1.

Economists of all political stripes have called this tax cut critical for America's continued economic growth. They say that letting it lapse could push us back into a deep recession. Truly, that would be unforgivable based on where we are today and how far we have come in a short time—almost 3 years now.

Some on the other side of the political aisle seem unsure about renewing the tax relief—the tax cut aimed at middle-class families and small businesses—this after fighting for massive tax cuts for the wealthy in our deficit reduction talks. If they block this tax cut, about 160 million families will get the news during the holidays that their taxes are going up on January 1. That is simply not fair. It makes no sense just when the economic indicators, as I mentioned, are looking so positive.

As I said, if we don't act, a typical family making \$50,000 a year would see their taxes increase about \$1,000. But if we pass the middle-class tax cut in 2011, for the 2012 tax year, that same family will get a total tax cut of \$1,500. Not only would they see the thousand, but they would get something additional because of the way we drafted this.

Most of that money will go directly into the economy. In Alaska, roughly 400,000 people benefited from the tax cut this year, and they used it to pump about \$300 million into the State and

local economies—again, the small businesses that I traveled to, a couple of them with my son and his cousin, House of Hobbies and the Bosco store. While they were playing all the games for free, playing the race cars and all that stuff and looking at baseball cards, I was asking the clerk: What does it feel like? There is no question that they said there is a change in the economy in the positive. That is because in Alaska, for example, these 400,000 people had \$300 million in their pockets—not the IRS putting it into the Treasury, but they had it and they spent it. And I will be frank about it—after my son and my nephew, his cousin, spent that time on the free road there playing with toys, I spent some money to help my small businesses and the economy. That is what it is about.

This tax cut put \$110 billion into the American economy this year. Let me say that again—\$110 billion. It is money that could go to the IRS or to middle-class Americans. I think the choice is very clear as to who should benefit from those dollars.

We were elected—as I was from Alaska—to represent all Americans, not just those at the top end but the people who work every day, those whom we see on a regular basis when we go back home or walk out of this building or actually in this building, the people spending time every day working hard to move this economy forward. It is our obligation to continue to do what we can to make their lives a little bit better by lessening their burden of taxes and giving them the tax relief that they deserve and that we should be able to give to them as January 1 rolls around.

I hope that, as we move toward the holiday season, we can continue to give the gift of tax relief to the middle-class Americans—to my 400,000 folks back in Alaska and all of the small businesses in Alaska that have benefited. Let's do what is right and do it in a bipartisan way and move forward in giving continued tax relief to middle-class Americans.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. FRANKEN). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. SESSIONS. Madam President, I understand the President made another speech today, and the speeches he has been giving lately are clever political documents. It is pretty clear his focus has shifted from governing to campaigning, with about a year from now until election day. But our Nation is in a serious financial condition. Our debt

is larger than we like to acknowledge it is. Our European friends on the other side of the Atlantic are wrestling with their debt problems, and many of those nations—most of those nations—have debt less than we do as a percentage of GDP. We know, from every expert we have heard testify before the Budget Committee, on which I serve as ranking member, that we must change our path. We are on an unsustainable path, and we cannot continue on it.

Time after time we have had hearings and have heard from experts telling us we have to alter our debt trajectory. We have to get on a sound path. Perhaps it will be a tougher path for a few years, a harder road, but it is the right road, and the road that will lead to soundness in our economy. Prosperity and growth is what we need.

The debt commission President Obama appointed, headed by Mr. Erskine Bowles and Senator Alan Simpson, told us we are on a path to the most predictable financial crisis the Nation has ever been on. They were saying that the unsustainable trajectory of the this country's debt will lead us to some sort of economic catastrophe. It will knock us back into a recession, put us back to where we were in 2007 or 2008, or like what Europe is facing right now. They pleaded with us to do something about it.

The debt commission laid out a plan. I don't agree with everything in the plan, but it said, at a minimum—and there was bipartisan agreement on this—the debt should be reduced. The added debt we incur over the next 10 years should be reduced by at least \$4 trillion. They said we should reduce the growth of our debt by at least \$4 trillion.

So in the last two meetings in the Budget Control Act, it looks as if we achieved about \$2.1 trillion, not \$4 trillion, but they all said we needed more than that, because the increase in our debt over the next 10 years would be about \$8 trillion to \$10 trillion. That is the increase on top of the \$15 trillion we have already incurred. This past fiscal year, which ended on September 30, we will have added \$1.23 trillion to our debt; the year before that, \$1.3 trillion, the year before that, \$1.2 trillion—the only three times in history we have had deficits over \$1 trillion. It is a very serious situation.

So we have a speech. I just have to say, we tried to look at the speech to see what it is that the President has proposed. He is our leader, our Commander in Chief. We only have one Chief Executive, one Governor, one mayor. I see Senator MANCHIN here. He was a Governor. He had to manage the State and exercise leadership.

So what is it this Executive, our President, is proposing that we do? Well, it is pretty clear. It appears that he is proposing that we spend next year \$324 billion more than we planned to spend. He calls it a tax cut or maintaining a tax cut. In truth, it is a holiday from paying into our Social Security pension that all Americans pay

into as they work. It is a holiday from that.

Well, where does the money come from? We have a trust fund, Social Security, that we pay into, and we have a promised benefit when we retire. We want to honor that and make sure the Social Security trust fund is able to honor that. How do we not pay into it without hurting or damaging the Social Security trust fund?

They say: Well, don't worry. We will put the money in. Who is "we"? Well, "we" is the United States Treasury. The United States Treasury will put the money in. But the Treasury is projected by the Congressional Budget Office to run a \$1 trillion deficit this year, a little bit better than the \$1.23 trillion deficit that we ran last year.

So we are running a \$1 trillion deficit. We don't have any money in the Treasury to pay to Social Security. So how do we honor the Social Security trust fund? How do we put the money in? Well, we give bonds. Just an IOU. The United States Treasury, as easy as pie, signs a document, an IOU, gives it to Social Security, and says: You are made whole. Don't worry; no problem. What? Me worry? We have it under control. Where does this come from?

Social Security is on a trajectory that is going to call this debt. The trustees are going to need this money to pay our beneficiaries, and they are going to call the debt to the United States Treasury and the United States Treasury is going to have to pay it, in my opinion, unless we totally abandon our responsibility to the seniors in America. I don't think we will. So we are going to pay that money, and it is added to the debt. This year, under the President's plan, beginning in January, he will add \$324 billion in debt.

What the Bowles-Simpson Commission was all about was laying out a plan to reduce our debt, not increase the debt. The first thing we have to do to confront a surging debt in America is to quit digging the hole deeper, quit asserting new programs to spend larger and larger amounts of money. It would also add \$155 billion the second year. So it would total \$479 billion over the first two years.

So they say: Well, we have the Treasury figured out. We will have a tax increase. We will raise taxes, and over 10 years that will pay for the \$479 billion that is added to our debt right now. There will be enough money coming in—don't worry—over 10 years from this new tax.

Well, I will just say a couple things about that. If we are going to raise taxes, what the bipartisan Debt Commission told us was, use it to pay down debt. Don't use it to fund a new spending program of \$479 billion. If we are going to cut spending somewhere in the program to save money, let's begin to reduce our debt. Don't just cut spending so we can create a new spending program.

We have to watch what we are doing. I don't believe it has been thought

through carefully where we are headed, and I don't see anything in this speech today that will lay out a 2-year, 5-year, 10-year plan for making America a stronger and better place.

But, we are told, the President cares about the middle class; and if we question any of these schemes, then we don't care about working Americans. I reject that. That is offensive to me. I totally believe that I represent the cross-section of people in my State and America. I love and respect the working people of this country, and they are entitled to better. They are entitled to leadership that tells them the truth. The truth is that we are endangering their future and their children's future by allowing the most incredible debt increases that the Nation has ever seen, and that has to be brought under control.

It is offensive to suggest that if someone has a different view about how to create jobs and wealth in America, they don't care about the people who make America great, people who go to work every day, people who send their children to defend this country and pay their taxes and obey the law and do things right and support those who are in trouble and need help.

I would propose this, more specifically—and I think the Republican plan touches these very issues in an effective way that would, in fact, increase and enhance job creation and economic growth in America.

First, we need policies that reduce the cost of energy for Americans. We have an Energy Department and an Interior Department that seem to believe their goal in life should be to drive up the cost of energy: to make coal and natural gas harder to produce, make oil more hard to produce, make us have to buy it from abroad when we could produce more at home, creating jobs in this country, creating wealth in this country, creating taxpayers in this country.

We need more American energy. We need more energy at lower prices. The idea that somehow we are going to be better off because of carbon or other issues to have higher energy prices so we use less of it is totally unjustified, and it is creating an incredible burden on working Americans.

We need to end the health care proposal that is clearly driving up health care costs. It is causing businesses not to hire. I have talked to small businesses in my State. They assure me with absolute confidence that the health care bill that will be taking effect, and is beginning to take effect, will cause them to hire fewer people. We need more people hired. We need more people working. We need to eliminate unnecessary, counterproductive governmental regulations that drive up the costs of our products, making them less competitive in the world marketplace. We need to do that. It will not cost the Treasury any money, but it will make America more productive and create jobs.

I supported and worked with my Democratic colleagues, and we passed in this Senate—but the President didn't support it—legislation to demand that China treat its currency in a fair way to eliminate the currency manipulation they have been participating in and to eliminate the unfair hammering, savaging of American industry that is occurring in this country as a result of unfair trade. That is very real. It has to end, and the President needs to be leading on that. It would create jobs in our country without adding to our debt.

Finally, the greatest threat to our economic growth and to our job creation in America is the debt itself. It is the cloud over our economy. We have to do more about it.

There is one more thing I would mention; that is, tax simplification and tax alteration. Not to necessarily get less taxes but to create the tax revenue that the government takes in in a way that does not damage the economy. Create a tax simplification plan that would encourage economic growth and prosperity and not pull down economic growth and prosperity. So once we have done those things, we begin to focus on reducing our surging debt. If we do it steadfastly, like Governors all over America—Governor Bentley in Alabama is having to face challenges and is making tough decisions. But the State is still operating. It hasn't sunk into the ocean. Neither has New Jersey. Neither have other States. Even New York and others are beginning to confront their debt situation and make tough choices.

We are not doing it here. Our President is proposing more spending—not just this \$324 billion plan for this year, he is proposing to spend 10 percent more on the Education Department next year, 10 percent more on the Department of "anti-Energy," 10 percent more for the State Department at a time when the country is in its most severe debt crisis in its history. That is not responsible. This debt is a threat to us.

If we talk to the financial experts and the wizards who move money around the world, they are worried about it. If we talk to government experts such as the Secretary of the Treasury or the Federal Reserve Chairman or the head of the Congressional Budget Office, they tell us what we are doing is dangerous, that we are on an unsustainable path. I do not see in this speech today any commitment, any leadership from the President on this fundamental issue. The most fundamental failure of his leadership is not to look the American people in the eye and to tell them honestly and truthfully that we are spending too much.

Back in Marion, AL, I was at a town meeting at somebody's house with 30 or 40 people there. The oldest gentleman there spoke last. He had fought in World War II. He grew up during the Depression. He told us, in his view, it was not the high cost of living that was

getting us in trouble but the cost of living too high.

I do believe we have been living too high, and we have been spending too much. The President—our leader—should be talking directly and honestly to us and laying out a 2-year, 5-year, 10-year plan that will bring this deficit down. He should be explaining to the American people why we are all going to have to tighten our belts; why there is nothing—defense or anything else—that is going to avoid having to tighten its belt. We can do this and put our country on a sound path without having a debt crisis that would be a tragedy of monumental proportions.

Madam President, I just wanted to share those thoughts today. This Congress is going to have to do more than tread water for the next year. We are going to have to do more than just play clever political games. We are going to have to deal with the threat we face directly and honestly.

The proposal I see that was floated again today from the White House may sound good politically. But for me, as one who has been looking at the numbers, it does one thing: it increases the debt over the 2 years by \$479 billion. That means probably this year's deficit will not be \$1 trillion but probably \$1.35 trillion—1,350 billion dollars—this year's deficit. We are promised that there will be a tax increase that, after 10 years, will somehow pay for this.

That is the kind of thinking and action that has allowed this country to get out of control financially, and I hope we can do better.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from West Virginia.

NATIONAL MINER'S DAY

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I rise today to mark a truly important day for my State, and indeed this entire nation.

December 6 is National Miner's Day, a time when we stop to honor our nation's coal miners and remember those who have done so much to make this great country what we are today. These brave men and women work every day to meet the challenge of keeping our great nation free and strong, and although the history of mining has been marked by hardship and tragedy, the bravery of our miners has never faltered.

It is so fitting that today we also learned—just this morning—of a landmark settlement of more than \$200 million in one of the worst mining tragedies our State has faced.

April 5, 2010, 29 miners lost their lives in the Upper Big Branch mine, which was then owned by Massey Energy. Today, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of West Virginia, Booth Goodwin, announced an agreement with Alpha Natural Resources, the company that purchased the Massey mines.

This comprehensive and forward-looking settlement takes the right

steps to truly protect our miners. By investing more than \$120 million of this settlement in mine safety—including improvements to existing mines, a new West Virginia safety training facility and a research trust—this agreement demonstrates that the government and the company are serious about creating a true legacy of mine safety.

While nothing can replace the beloved miners who we lost that terrible day, today's agreement shows that we all have zero tolerance for anything corporations do—or don't do—that leads to a mine fatality.

As I have always said, at the heart of this tragedy is the simple fact that we must do everything in our power to never, ever allow any worker to be in the position where this could happen to them or their family. Especially since today is National Miner's Day, my thoughts and prayers are with the families of the 29 miners who died at Upper Big Branch—and I want to assure the families that the loss of their loved ones will not be in vain. Every worker should know that when they kiss their children goodbye in the morning that they will return home at the end of that shift or the end of the day to kiss them goodnight.

I thank U.S. Attorney Goodwin and his entire team for their skill and dedication in negotiating this settlement that focuses on safety and training in the future. I also thank Alpha Natural Resources for rising to this occasion and meeting these terms. Even though Alpha did not own the Upper Big Branch mine at the time of the disaster, I applaud the company for taking responsibility for both the mistakes that were made and for investing in the future of mining to help prevent another tragedy like this from ever taking place. I encourage them—and all our mining companies—to continue to take steps to protect our miners.

In addition, I am pleased that this agreement does not impede the families from pursuing additional civil remedies and does not prevent the authorities from prosecuting individuals whose actions may warrant criminal charges. There should be no immunity for anyone who is determined to be responsible in any way for the tragedy at Upper Big Branch.

April 5, 2010 was one of our State's most heartbreaking days. I hope and pray that we will never again endure a tragedy like the Upper Big Branch deaths, and I will work every day to make sure that we don't.

Today we also remember the 104th anniversary of the Monongah Mine tragedy, our Nation's worst mining disaster—one that took 362 brave souls.

So on this day, it is fitting to pay our respects and show appreciation for the miners of yesterday and today. We need to recognize the contributions of past miners who have led us to where we are now, and today's miners who keep traveling deep into the darkness to provide millions of Americans with the electricity that powers our lives

and the steel with which we build our Nation.

Without these men and women, our world would look very different. They are the true backbone of our country. Our miners extracted the coal that powered military ships in World War I and World War II—and every conflict since.

Coal provided the steel to make our country the greatest industrial power in the world, ushering in prosperity that built our infrastructure and developed a quality of life that became and is still the envy of the world. Coal provides nearly half of the electricity in our country and every day millions of homes are warm, safe and full of light thanks to coal.

Think for a moment. Try to imagine our country if there had been no coal. It is almost inconceivable.

Coal is mined all over our great Nation. I thank all men and women everywhere who work in this industry, but I can speak personally about our brave and hardworking miners in West Virginia. The miners of West Virginia and their families are the heart and soul of the Mountain State and truly an inspiration for me.

Extracting minerals from the earth is not for the faint of heart. This work requires engineering brilliance, nerves of steel and fearless dedication. West Virginia coal miners continue to set the bar for productivity, quality, and innovation. Their work ethic is second to none. Coal miners are not looking for a handout. All they want is a work permit so they can go to work, earn a good wage, and provide for their families.

And coal miners are much more than just the work they do—they are some of the most loyal, brave, trusted, and patriotic folks that you could ever meet. Like their fellow West Virginians, these folks can shake your hand, look into your eyes, and touch your heart. Our coal miners love their families, the outdoors, their communities and their State. These miners work hard every shift, but if they get home and find a person in need, their day begins again. If you are hungry, you will be fed; if you are lost, you will get directions and then an escort to your destination. That's just the kind of people we are, and that makes me so proud every day to be a West Virginian and have the honor of representing them.

I will continue to tell our State's story when it comes to 'coal. And I will constantly work with my colleagues on both sides of aisle to develop technology that allows us to continue to use American coal to help achieve energy independence for our great country—which will ensure our national security and grow our economy. The simple fact is: This country needs coal and our coal miners are still willing and able to do the job.

So today it is my privilege to say thank you for the job that our brave coal miners perform. This Nation was